

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 050994
ORIGIN NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
AID-05 /064 R

DRAFTED BY NEA/AFN:JKBISHOP:MAR
APPROVED BY NEA/AFN:TSWILKINSON
-----063836 281735Z /43

R 281537Z FEB 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY TUNIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 050994

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, TS

SUBJECT: AHMED MESTIRI IN THE U.S.

1. SUMMARY: TUNISIAN OPPOSITION LEADER MESTIRI MET FEBRUARY 23 AT HIS REQUEST WITH QUANDT OF NSC. AFN DIRECTOR BISHOP ALSO PARTICIPATED. MESTIRI LECTURED AT BROOKINGS UNDER MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE AUSPICES PREVIOUS DAY AND AT GEORGETOWN UNDER AUSPICES FOR CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ARAB STUDIES FEBRUARY 23. RAMSAY CLARK ARRANGED FEBRUARY 23 LUNCHEON ATTENDED BY SEN. ABOUREZK AND TWO OTHER CONGRESSMEN, WHOSE NAMES MESTIRI DID NOT RECALL. HIS CHARACTERIZATIONS OF NOUIRA GOVERNMENT CONSISTENTLY SEVERE IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE AND BLEAK FUTURE DESCRIBED FOR TUNISIA. END SUMMARY.

2. IN DISCUSSION WITH QUANDT/BISHOP, MESTIRI SHARPLY CRITICAL OF NOUIRA GOVERNMENT, WHICH HE ACCUSED OF PROVOKING RECENT DISORDERS (INCLUDING THOSE AT UNIVERSITY AND LYCEES) TO JUSTIFY SUPPRESSION OF ALL OPPOSITION. "CLAN" AROUND NOUIRA FEARS REPETITION OF PROBLEMS SPAIN EXPERIENCED.
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PAGE 02 STATE 050994

IENCING AFTER FRANCO'S DEATH AND HAS DECIDED KEEP LID ON TIGHT. TUNISIA THUS HAS ENTERED A NEW ERA AND HE FEARS FOR FUTURE. FRUSTRATIONS WILL TURN YOUTH TO VIOLENCE, AND THIS WILL INCREASE RISK OF FOREIGN, I.E., LIBYAN OR ALGER-

IAN, INTERVENTION. A MILITARY COUP CANNOT BE EXCLUDED. MESTIRI AND HIS FRIENDS OPPOSED ON MORAL GROUNDS TO DEALING

WITH THE "CLAN" BECAUSE IT HAS BLOOD ON ITS HANDS. BOUR-
GUIBA DID NOT WANT TO BELIEVE SOCIAL DISCONTENT WAS
SEVERE WHEN MESTIRI WARNED HIM IN OCTOBER. ONLY THE VOICES
OF TUNISIA'S FOREIGN FRIENDS ARE LIKELY TO MAKE BOURGUIBA
REALIZE REPRESSIVE STRATEGY OF NOUIRA WILL LEAD TO VIO-
LENCE AND DISASTER.

3. IN RESPONDING TO MESTIRI, QUANDT STRESSED REMARKABLE
PROGRESS TUNISIA HAS ACHIEVED SINCE INDEPENDENCE IN IMPROV-
ING ECONOMIC WELL-BEING. TUNISIAN EXPERIENCE IN BOTH
ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SPHERES COMPARES FAVORABLY WITH
THAT ELSEWHERE IN NORTH AFRICA AND MIDDLE EAST. QUANDT
URGED MESTIRI TO CAUTION THOSE WHO WOULD RESORT TO VIO-
LENCE, AND BISHOP SAID SAD EXAMPLE OF LEBANON SHOULD BE
REMEMBERED BY THOSE WHO THINK VIOLENCE WILL REDRESS
GRIEVANCES.

4. IN PUBLIC ADDRESSES MESTIRI PLACED BLAME FOR JANUARY
BLOODSHED SQUARELY ON NOUIRA GOVERNMENT AND PSD. HE
CLAIMED GOVERNMENT/PARTY HAD INITIATED VIOLENCE AND
SOLDIERS HAD FIRED WANTONLY ON INNOCENT CIVILIANS. RE-
GIME HAS RESORTED TO BRUTAL REPRESSION AS SOLE MEANS
MAINTAINING ITSELF IN POWER. DENOUNCING RIGIDITY OF PSD,
MESTIRI CALLED FOR TWO PARTY SYSTEM. MEI TALK ATTENDED
BY ABOUT 100, GEORGETOWN LECTURE BY 35.

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PAGE 03 STATE 050994

5. IN SEVERAL OF HIS WASHINGTON CONVERSATIONS, MESTIRI
DESCRIBED MEETING IN PARIS WITH "SENIOR LIBYAN DELEGATION"
AND DISCUSSION OF TUNISIAN/LIBYAN UNION. HE SAID HE TOLD
LIBYANS UNION MIGHT BE APPROPRIATE, PROVIDED TUNISIAN
INSTITUTIONS PRESERVED, BUT UNION MUST BE APPROACHED CARE-
FULLY AND PATIENTLY, WITH STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH. PRESENT
MOMENT OBVIOUSLY AN UNDESIRABLE TIME TO EMBARK ON SUCH A
PROCESS.

6. MESTIRI'S TRAVEL PLANS WILL TAKE HIM TO AUSTRIA FOR
MEETING WITH KREISKY, FRG, SAUDI ARABIA, AND POSSIBLY TO
OTHER COUNTRIES OF MAGHREB. HE DOES NOT EXPECT RETURN
TUNIS UNTIL AFTER MID-MARCH. VANCE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: OPPOSITION PARTIES, PARTY LEADERS, VISITS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 28 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE050994
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: JKBISHOP:MAR
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780091-1295
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978023/aaaaabuw.tel
Line Count: 107
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: d02a2bd2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3525497
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: AHMED MESTIRI IN THE U.S.
TAGS: PINT, OTRA, TS, (MESTIRI, AHMED)
To: TUNIS
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d02a2bd2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014